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ABSTRACT

Although illegal, sexual harassment is frequent in the American workplace and extremely disruptive and costly to employees and employers alike. Most organizational responses to the problem have been hard line, short term, after-the-fact measures that inform, threaten, or discipline employees. What is needed, however, is a training program with an emphasis on understanding and improving male-female interaction on the job. Such a program should include information about the definition and legalities of sexual harassment, information about company philosophy and grievance procedures, awareness training about typical causes of sexual harassment, and male-female interaction training as a way to prevent sexual harassment. Awareness of male-female differences in verbal, nonverbal, and interpersonal communication should clarify both male and female workers' misunderstandings of each others' motives and behaviors. Finally, both sexes should also learn to develop new, nonstereotyped communication skills. (JL)

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COMMUNICATION TRAINING AS A PRE[illegible]TION TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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COMMUNICATION TRAINING AS A PREVENTION TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A great deal of attention is being directed to the complicated, sensitive, and significant issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. Personnel and training magazines, the popular press, and academic journals make us aware of the legal definitions and ramifications, the extent of the problem, and its negative consequences for organizations. The November 1980 EEOC guidelines on sexual harassment clearly mandate a corporate responsibility concerning the problem. As a result, personnel specialists realize and are responding to the need for training programs on the subject. What is not clear, however, is the form that such programs should take. A general and widespread confusion exists among human resource trainers concerning which preventative, protective, and disciplinary measures should be instituted in response to the sexual harassment problem.

Let us briefly review what is known about sexual harassment, examine the current nature and effectiveness of personnel departments' response, and offer a unique training model which can be embraced by both male and female employees as a long-term prevention to sexual harassment.

Legalities, Extent, and Consequences of Sexual Harassment

While there has been controversy about definitions and employers' liability, the revised November 1980 EEOC guidelines clarify sexual harassment as an unlawful employment practice under Section 703 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.[1] Legally, it is incumbent upon companies to provide all employees with a work environment free of any form of discrimination, including harassment. It is

illegal for a supervisor or co-worker to engage in unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such behavior constitutes sexual nature. Such behavior constitutes sexual harassment whether submission is made an implicit or explicit condition of employment; whether employment decisions are based on submission to or rejection of such behavior; or whether such behavior substantially interferes with work performance or creates an initimdating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Additionally, an employer is responsible for the behaviors of all its employees (whether supervisor or co-worker) regardless of whether those behaviors were forbidden and regardless of whether the employer knew or should have known of the occurence of those behaviors. The employer is also responsible for the behaviors of non-employees if the employer knew or should have known of the harassing behavior. The employer has the defense of having taken "immediate and corrective action" in the cases of harassment by co-workers and non-employees.

The statistics from several surveys show the extent of sexual harassment in the American workplace. A 1975 Cornell University study of 155 female members of a Civil Service Employee's Association and women attending a convention on sexual harassment reported that 70% of these women experienced some form of sexual harassment.[2] Redbook magazine conducted a national survey of its readers in January and November of 1976. Of 9,000 women workers who voluntarily responded to the survey, 90% reported that they had experienced one or more forms of unwanted sexual attention on the job.[3] Sangamon State University conducted a study in the fall of 1979 of Illinois state government offices. Of the 1495 female respondents,

59% reported experiencing one or more incidents of sexual harassment in their present place of employment.[4] A government-wide survey conducted by the Merit Service Protection Board reported in 1980 that 42% of women in the federal workforce had experienced some form of sexual harassment.[5]

Increasingly, employers realize that sexual harassment poses negative consequences not only for the victim but for the entire organization as a whole. A harassed worker is likely to take more sick leave, become accident-prone, resort to abuses in alcohol and drug consumption, disrupt team-work, and affect the organization's communication atmosphere. Besides being vulnerable to a lawsuit, the organization with sexual harassment problems faces worker stress, decreased worker morale, and higher rates of absenteeism, turnover, and productivity problems. In short, sexual harassment is extremely disruptive and costly to employees and employers alike.[6]

Personnel's Response to Sexual Harassment

Organizational response to the sexual harassment problem takes several forms, including establishing and disseminating a corporate policy statement, informing supervisors of their responsibility in recognizing and detecting harassment, establishing organizational sanctions against such behavior, and instituting in-house grievance procedures. The personnel and training literature offers sample corporate policy statements, discussions of issues to be considered when establishing a training program, and a model program consisting of a position statement, detection training for supervisors, company sanctions, and sensitivity training for supervisors in how to develop rapport and how to handle sensitive topics.[7]

While these suggestions are necessary and perhaps valuable, they seem to comprise "protection" measures to insure EEOC compliance. It is clear that the prevalent organizational response to the sexual harassment problem has been hard-line, short-term, or after-the-fact measures that inform, threaten, or discipline employees. Such a response should be regarded as just one phase of a larger program. In and of themselves, these protection measures are limited in scope and effectiveness. Personnel specialists warn of the typical reactions to or repurcutions of such sexual harassment programs:[8]

> "Administrators may encounter a general disbelief among many male employees who cannot believe that their language, attitudes, and jokes can now be construed as sexual harassment."
>
> "A breakdown in communication may occur if complaints and grievances are not taken seriously."
>
> "It is relatively normal for males to seek access to female subordinates."
>
> "Females in business and industry have to get a little tougher attitude toward life in general."
>
> "Women who object have no sense of humor."
>
> "Comprehensive training programs may actually increase the number of complaints filed against a company."

It seems logical that resistance, frustration, and defensiveness would result from sexual harassment training programs that take only a punitive or disciplinary approach. What is needed is an on-going training program with an emphasis on understanding and improving male-female interaction on the job. Such a program should confront and change basic stereotypical attitudes held by both males and females toward both male and females roles. The incidents of sexual harassment will be reduced only when preventative training is established to create an organizational environment of open, cooperative,

flexible male-female colleague relationships. This type of training will meet with more positive reactions in the workplace and will provide a long-term preventative measure to sexual harassment.

Communication Training as a Prevention to Sexual Harassment

A wholistic program of training should have the following four facets:

I. Information about the definition and legalities of sexual harassment.

Both males and females in the workplace must be aware of the extent of behaviors that can be classified as sexual harassment. Currently, there exist objections from males who justifiably claim, "I didn't know that is sexual harassment. I've been doing that for years and don't mean any harm by it. No one has objected to that before!" Likewise, many women as targets of objectionable behavior have perceived no recourse because they have not been aware of the legal definitions and implications surrounding sexual harassment. Both males and females in the workplace must be made aware that sexual harassment consists of "any repeated and unwanted sexual comments. looks, suggestions, or physical contact which is perceived as objectionable or offensive or causes job discomfort."[9]

II. Information about company philosophy and grievance procedures for sexual harassment.

As the current personnel and training literature suggests, organizations must communicate explicitly strong position statements prohibiting sexual harassment and must establish workable and effective monitoring and grievance mechanisms for sexual harassment problems.[10]

III. Awareness training about typical causes of sexual harassment.

It is clear that sexual harassment more often stems from a power motive than from a sexual motive. Backhouse and Cohen, authors of Sexual Harassment on the Job, link sexual harassment to an authoritarian, power-ridden workplace where females, by virtue of their powerlessness, become targets of sexual coercion and exploitation.[11] The authors explain that the employer-employee relationship embodies clear-cut power implications; consequently, job-related reprisals need not be attached to sexual invitations for those invitations to constitute sexual harassment. An unsolicited sexual advance made by a person with the authority to hire and fire is inherently coercive.

Farley, author of The Sexual Shakedown, claims that the historical stereotype of men being superior to women underlies the sexual harassment problem.[12] The major argument of MacKinnon in Sexual Harrassment of Working Women is that sexual harassment is a continuation of society's deep-rooted expectation that a women trades her sexuality for economic security.[13] Sexual harassment is part of the traditional male role of dominance over women. It is a crime of power in one sphere (employment) being levied in another sphere (sexual). It is a crime of power that happens to be wielded in the sexual domain.

These points can be made in a training program in such a way as to avoid "blame" and lessen male defensiveness. Both males and females should be made aware that male dominance and female submission has been a traditional relational pattern fostered by decades of sex-role socialization. Both sexes become victims of rigid sex-role expectations which define males as aggressive, active, dominant,

independent, and competitive and females as submissive, passive, dependent, cooperative, and conforming to male directives. These stereotypes are consistent and pervasive and exert real pressure upon individuals to behave in prescribed sex-appropriate ways.[14] An awareness of these sex-role differences should provide a better understanding of the power dynamics that underlie sexual harassment.

IV. Male-female interaction training as a prevention to sexual harassment.

The fourth and most detailed facet of a sexual harassment training program must involve the development of communication skills. There is much scientific and empirical evidence to show that males and females develop different communication styles as a result of their varied sex-role socialization experiences. As long as we are communicating differently, and we are not aware of these different styles, male-female interaction will be fraught with misunderstandings and breakdowns which inevitably lead to sexual harassment problems. What follows is an enumeration of male-female communication differences and their implications for the sexual harassment problem.[15]

A. Male-female verbal communication differences.

1. Women disclose more personal information to others than men do. Through disclosure of personal information, women unknowingly may give power to me. Power is the basis of sexual harassment.
2. In conversation, men are expected to analyze, clarify, evaluate, and control the flow. Women are expected to stroke, reinforce, reduce tension, and restore unity. Such conversational devices enhance conversational power and credibility for males and lessen it for females.

3. Men typically are more assertive and aggressive in their communication while women typically are less assertive and aggressive. This gives men the verbal tools of sexual harassment and deprives women of the verbal means for stopping sexual harassment in the early stages.

B. Male-female nonverbal communication differences.

1. Women show more eye contact in conversation than men do. This increased eye contact may derive from politeness, a desire to understand the message, or a need to seek approval. However, this eye contact may be interpreted as flirtation.
2. Men stand closer to females, seat themselves closer to females, and otherwise intrude on females' territory. This may be seen as threatening by females. Women who allow these invasions of personal space may be seen as desiring that physical closeness.
3. Females are touched more often by males than vice versa. Touch, especially in the workplace, is more often a signal of dominance rather than a signal of sexual interest. Men must "unlearn" this touch prerogative and women must learn not to allow unwanted male touch.
4. Men more often use gestures that gain attention and influence. Women who use these gestures may be responded to sexually.
5. Female voice pitch patterns do not carry as much credibility and authority as male voice pitch patterns. Female voice intonation patterns typically convey emotionality and helplessness. Pitch and intonation are learned communication habits than can be changed.

6. Women smile more than men do. Women's smiling may be perceived as a sexual invitation.
7. Men in organizations have standards of professional dress and appearance. Increasingly, women in organizations must adopt a profesional "uniform."

C. Male-female interpersonal relationship differences.

1. Men use humor more often than women do. Men show more humorous competing behaviors such as "banter" and "zinging" each other. Women who use these same behaviors may be seen as flirting.
2. Female friendships typically are based on personal closeness. Male friendships typically are based on mutual activities and goals. Because males and females form friendships for different reasons, male-female friendships on the job may result in a misinterpretation of motives.

These male-female communication differences have tremendous implications for the sexual harrassment problem. An awareness of these different communication styles should clarify both male and female workers' misunderstandings of each others' motives and behavior. Coupled with this, both males and females should learn to develop new, non-stereotyped communication skills. This does not mean that males should communicate in a "feminine" style or that females should communicate in a "masculine" style. Rather, both sexes must be equiped with the skills of behavioral flexibility - to communicate in a way that is appropriate to the situation instead of being restricted by sex-role limitations. The following are specific communication skills that should be developed as the final phase of a sexual harassment prevention training

program.

Males should learn how to self-disclose, how to use more supportive and less aggressive conversational styles, how to show eye contact and how to interpret females' eye contact, how to avoid invasions of others' personal space, how to avoid unwanted touching, how to interpret females' smiling behavior, how to interpret female humor, how to interpret female's friendship motives. Additionally, males should improve their communication skills of listening, empathy, papaphrasing, perception checking, conflict management, and avoiding defensiveness.

Females should learn how to selectively self-disclose, how to use more assertive conversational styles, how to selectively give eye contact, how to prohibit invasions of their personal space, how to prohibit unwanted touch, how to use gestures of attention and influence, how to develop pitch and intonation patterns that convey credibility and authority, to smile only when appropriate, to adopt standards of professional dress, how to use humor, and how to interpret males' friendship motives. Additionally, females should improve their communication skills of listening, empathy, paraphrasing, perception checking, conflict management, and avoiding defensiveness.

A training program that has these four facets will provide an understanding of sexual harassment, will reduce stereotypical attitudes, and will create an organizational environment of open, cooperative, flexible male-female colleague relationships. There will be less resistance to a program that takes the attitude that both sexes are victims of sex-role expectations and both sexes

must change their behaviors to permanently eliminate sexual harassment. Such a long-range program combines typical male and female communication styles and develops new communication skills for males and females so that modern organizations can use the multifaceted potentials of all its members.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"Rules and Regulations," Federal Register, Vol. 45, No. 219, (November 10, 1980).

[2]Data reported in "Sexual Harassment on the Job: Questions and Answers," available from Working Women's Institute, 593 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10021.

[3]Claire Safran, "What Men Do To Women on the Job - A Shocking Look Sexual Harassment," Redbook, November 1976.

[4]Sangamon State University Questionnaire, "Survey for Women Employees - State of Illinois," Springfield, Illinois, August 7, 1979.

[5]Summary of Preliminary Findings on Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace given before the Subcommittee on Investigations Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, U.S. House of Representatives, September 25, 1980.

[6]See Constance Backhouse and Leah Cohen. Sexual Harassment on the Job (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.., 1981); Michele Hoyman and Ronda Robinson, "Interpreting the New Sexual Harassment Guidelines," Personnel Journal, Vol. 59, No. 12 (December 1980), 996-1000; James C. Renick, "Sexual Harassment at Work: Why It Happens, What To Do About It," Personnel Journal, Vol. 59, No. 8 (August 1980), 658-662.

[7]See Jeanne Bosson Driscoll, "Sexual Attraction and Harassment: Management's New Problems," Personnel Journal, Vol. 60, No. 1 (January 1981), 33-36; George K. Kronenberger and David L. Bourke, "Effective Training and the Elimination of Sexual Harassment," Personnel Journal, Vol. 60, No. 11 (November 1981), 879-883; Renick, August 1980; Hoyman and Robinson, December 1980.

[8]See Kronenberger and Bourke, November 1981; Renick, August 1980; Backhouse and Cohen, 1981.

[9]Definition from "Sexual Harassment on the Job: Results of Preliminary Survey," Available from Working Women's Institute.

[10]For model policy statements and programs, see Hoyman and Robinson, December 1980; Kronenberger and Bourke, November 1981.

[11]Backhouse and Cohe , 1981.

[12]Lin Farley, Sexual Shakedown (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1978).

[13]Catharine A. MacKinnon. Sexual Harassment of Working Women (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

[14]I.K. Broverman, S. R. Vogel, D. M. Broverman, F. E. Clarkson, and P. S. Rosenkrantz, "Sex-Role Stereotypes: A Current Appraisal," Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 28, 1972, 59-78.; Barbara Westbrook Eakins and R. Gene Eakins. Sex Differences in Human Communication (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978).

[15]For a discussion of male-female communication differences, see: Eakins and Eakins, Sex Differences in Human Communication; Cynthia L. Berryman and Virginia A. Eman (eds), Communication, Language, and Sex (Rowley, MA.: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1980); Mary Brown Parlee, "Conversational Politics," Psychology Today, May 1979, 48-56; Jessie Bernard, The Sex Game (New York: Antheneum, 1972); Barbara L. Florisha and Barbara H. Goldman, Outsiders on the Inside (Englewood Cliffs, N.C.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981); Jpseph Pleck, "Is Brotherhood Possible?" In N. Glazer-Malbin (ed). Old Family/New Family: Interpersonal Relationships (New York: VAn Nostrand Rheinhold, 1975); Betty Lehan Harragan, Games Mother Never Taught You: Corporate Gamesmanship for Women (New York: Rawson Associates Publishers, Inc., 1977);

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"Being Feminine or Masculine Nonverbally," In Irene H. Frieze, et. al. (eds). Women and Sex Roles (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978); Nancy M. Henley, Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977); Mary Ritchie Key, Male/Female Language (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1975); Gloria Steinem, "The Politics of Talking in Groups," Ms., May 1981.; Alice G. Sargent, Beyond Sex Roles (New York; West Publishing Company, 1977).